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SUBJECT: CODEL TANNER: MEETING WITH FRENCH POLITICAL  
DIRECTOR ARAUD

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

#### Summary

1. (C) During a meeting with Codel Tanner on February 22, French MFA Political Director Gerard Araud reviewed the current state of the bilateral relationship, commented on NATO's continuing purpose, and compared France's and Britain's historically distinct orientations towards the U.S. He also discussed Afghanistan and Iran, two outstanding cases of U.S.-French cooperation. On Afghanistan, Araud highlighted France's continued participation in NATO operations, but called for a more explicitly defined "political strategy" for reaching a desired end-state. On Iran, he emphasized the need for continuing pressure on Iran, through P-5 unity, which is impacting on Ahmadinejad's weakened position, and which offers the only hope for a negotiated outcome. End Summary.

#### NATO's Purpose

2. (C) MFA Political Director Gerard Araud hosted Codel Tanner, in Paris for the annual discussions of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NPA) Economic Committee with the OECD, to a meeting and luncheon on February 22. Ambassadors Stapleton and Morella also attended. Both sides saluted the historical links and continuing cultural and economic ties between the U.S. and France, along with our wide-ranging diplomatic cooperation. Araud took the opportunity of the visit of the U.S. members of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly to offer, in his typically plain-spoken fashion, a thumb-nail history of U.S.-French relations since World War II, including our different approaches to NATO. Recalling an Cold War bromide, Araud said that NATO's original purpose had been "to keep the Germans down, the Russians out, and the Americans in." Its current purpose is -- for the newer central European and Baltic members, given their fear of Russia, "rational or not" -- to keep the Americans in. For other members, NATO provides a way to meet their defense -- without having to pay for it. Araud decried the abysmally low defense spending by the European allies. Among the Europeans, only the French and the British come close to carrying their weight, an exception which can be explained by their history as global powers, and their residual desire to exert influence.

#### Trans-Atlantic Ties: The Cases of Britain, France and Germany

3. (C) Taking up this theme, Araud offered the Codel a historical disquisition on the differences between France's and Britain's post-war relationship with the U.S. Britain, for its part, tries to "ride the tiger," influencing U.S. policy behind the scenes. This is what they have tried to do

on Iraq: "With what success, we might ask?" France, on the other hand, tries to defend its interests, "tries to exist (as an independent player)." The U.S. often views this simply as opposition, or anti-Americanism, which it isn't: "We're trying to exist, and to exercise our right to have our own opinion, including on how to address international crises. That means that we may agree in some cases -- as on Iran where we work extremely closely, coordinating daily. In others, as in Iraq, we disagreed, and still do. This is not anti-Americanism, it's France developing its own analyses and exercising its own policy." Stepping back, Araud recalled that the 1956 Suez Crisis had marked the end of both France and the UK's great power aspirations. Each, however, drew a different lesson from their joint failure. U.S. opposition to the Suez operation, (which together with the Soviet Union's threat to use nuclear weapons had scuttled the Anglo-French operation), had led the British to conclude that "nothing was possible without the Americans," and that their influence would have to be applied through the U.S., by being at its side, and having its voice heard as America's most trusted ally. The French took a distinctly different course, that of autonomy and independence (as symbolized in its decision, a few months after Suez, to create its own nuclear force). Germany was a case apart, for historical reasons. With a military that was totally integrated into NATO, it was America's model ally. Now things are changing: for the first time since WW II, during the Iraq crisis, Germany opposed the U.S. While the British and French conception of their own roles -- "the special relationship" and independence/autonomy, respectively -- still apply, Germany's is now a question mark.

Afghanistan

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PARIS 00000743 002 OF 003

14. (C) In the back and forth that followed Araud's presentation, Ambassador Stapleton noted that we describe the current state of the relationship as "normal," a characterization which Araud's historical synopsis supported.

It's a relationship we value, said the Ambassador; and we certainly do not take the French for granted. Rep John Tanner (D-TN) agreed on the value of a diversity of opinion. Reaffirming strong U.S. support for NATO, he pointed to Afghanistan as the Alliance's defining issue. The U.S. appreciates France's support in this crucial battle. Congressman Paul Gillmor (R-OH), Vice-President of the NPA, noted the importance of the NATO to the U.S, France's commitment of resources to defense, and the commonality of interests in our joint effort in Afghanistan. (NOTE: Congressmen Tanner and Gillmor earlier met with French television and print media to push for strengthened Allied support in Afghanistan. END NOTE.) Araud agreed, citing the recent dispatch of the French aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle to the region, which will allow France to increase its participation in airstrikes in Afghanistan. However, France's concern is lack of a "political strategy" concerning Afghanistan, a point Chirac tried to make at the Riga Summit.

Perhaps France's proposed Contact Group wasn't the right solution, said Araud, as it raises the question of neighboring countries' roles, and Afghanistan's as well. But at the end of the day, success in Afghanistan will be political, "and we are simply not convinced we have a political strategy, an end-game in view, a roadmap to success. If what we are doing simply amounts to killing Taliban every Spring, some of us, five years from now, will have tired of this. That's our concern; we're not criticizing NATO, which is doing it's job. It's the political strategy that's missing. For example, Iran is a natural ally in the fight against the Taliban. And there is the drug problem, which affects you, us and Russia. We're concerned about where we're going."

Iran

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15. (C) Responding to Congressman Dennis Moore's (D-KS) question about the French view of Iran, Araud underlined how closely the U.S. and France have been working together over the past four years. He distinguished Iran from North Korea, "a criminal regime which doesn't care about the suffering of its people." Iran, on the other hand, is a "sort of democracy," a proud country, where public opinion counts for something, and which doesn't want to be seen as a pariah state. This complex reality calls for a dual policy: a readiness to negotiate, but in a context of international pressure. During the negotiation of UNSCR 1737 a difference opened up between the U.S. and the EU-3, said Araud, with the U.S. seeking a stronger text, while the Europeans insisted on one that could be supported by the P-5. Araud contended that now the U.S. agrees, retrospectively, that the Europeans were right on insisting on a unanimous outcome, one that could not be interpreted as the West ganging up on Iran. UNSC unanimity (and especially China's vote) sent a powerful message of Iran's isolation, impacting strongly on Iranian public opinion. Araud admitted that "mercantile" factors were driving some, especially the Russians. While the French Treasury "is furious" about U.S. warnings to European banks about their operations with Iran, said Araud, those efforts work -- they're very effective. Araud commented that the U.S. military option is taken very seriously in Iran. As recounted to him by well-known French journalist Bernard Guetta, who recently returned from Tehran, "the Iranians are terrified; they take the U.S. military threat seriously -- people don't want it." Another important factor is Ahmadinejad's growing weakness. "He was elected because he wasn't corrupt, he promised housing and good administration, but he hasn't delivered. And there was his recent defeat in the municipal elections. That said, although the music has changed, the words haven't": The Iranians continue to refuse to suspend enrichment. Therefore we must keep up the pressure. And the pressure is working. So now we must work on a second sanctions resolution, and keep the door open to a "double suspension" deal with Iran. We haven't failed, emphasized Araud. According to Guetta, he said, many people close to Supreme Leader Khamenei had "incredibly violent things to say about Ahmadinejad whom they regard as an upstart. They want him out. The subdued celebration of Revolution Day, including Ahmadinejad's speech, in which he did not mention the Holocaust, was significant. Araud also pointed to a recent press interview with Velayati in which he affirmed that the Holocaust was a historical reality. We have two to three years, concluded Araud, to work on this before Iran gets the bomb. We will and must continue to work on this together -- including with the Russians and Chinese.

(6). (U) Codel Tanner did not have the opportunity to clear this cable before departing Paris.  
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PARIS 00000743 003 OF 003

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